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SUBJECT: NATURAL RESOURCES DEGRADATION IN ZIMBABWE

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SUMMARY  
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1. The degradation of Zimbabwe's natural resources is continuing at an alarming rate. Environmental and natural resource issues have taken a backseat to more pressing concerns. Confronted with insecure land tenure, food insecurity and rising poverty, there are few incentives for Zimbabweans to conserve natural resources or to invest in environmentally sustainable livelihood activities. The scarcity of up-to-date information on the state of the country's natural resources makes it difficult to assess the cumulative effects of the complex humanitarian crisis on the environment. This situation is all the more disturbing given Zimbabwe's past status as a leader in community-based natural resource management.

2. USAID/Zimbabwe brought together a number of practitioners, donors and NGOs to promote dialogue on these issues. In the past, USAID/Zimbabwe served as the lead donor in natural resources and participants welcomed the resumption and coordination of information-sharing in this sector. This cable outlines the issues discussed and debated at the natural resources forum. End Summary.

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BACKGROUND  
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3. Zimbabweans have expanded their consumption of natural resources to obtain food and cash for their survival. Strategies involve wood-cutting, thatch harvesting, collection of wild fruits and nuts, fishing, wildlife poaching, and gold mining. All of these could be viable livelihood approaches if carried out in a sustainable fashion, but today in Zimbabwe there are few checks and balances or incentives to harvest or manage sustainably.

4. For most of the past five years, the government and donors have been pre-occupied with issues such as the country's political stalemate or responding to the humanitarian crisis. Accordingly, little attention has been paid to the state of the country's natural resources. To facilitate a better understanding of the situation on the ground, USAID/Zimbabwe sponsored a half-day natural resources forum in February attended by donors (DFID, CIDA, EC, CIRAD), the UN (Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the UN Humanitarian Support Team), and NGOs (African Wildlife Foundation (AWF), World Wildlife Fund (WWF), International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), World Conservation Union, CESVI, Africa Center for Holistic Resources Management, Center for Applied Social Sciences (CASS), Zimbabwe Environmental Lawyers Association (ZELA), Institute for Environmental Studies, Parks and Wildlife Management Authority, University of Zimbabwe, CAMPFIRE Association). The purpose of the meeting was to open dialogue and share information on the status of key natural resources in Zimbabwe, on natural resources management (NRM) activities and on the current policy environment.

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INSECURITY OF LAND TENURE  
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5. Land tenure is not usually discussed openly outside the donor community in Zimbabwe due to political sensitivities -- although wide scale insecurity of tenure is a critical issue that negatively impacts on agricultural

productivity and incentives to use natural resources sustainably. The fast-track land reform process contributed to insecurity of land tenure for thousands of people. Of the country's approximately 4 500 white commercial farmers, all but about 300 have been evicted, and thousands of ex-commercial farmworkers displaced from farms are now jobless and homeless, with large numbers camped out in remote corners of the country on "state" land. (Note: USAID supports internally displaced persons (IDPs) with food and non-food items through OFDA funding to the International Office of Migration (IOM) End note.)

16. Land tenure insecurity also affects the resettled farmers. The new "A2" farmers who were resettled on former commercial farms acquired under the fast-track land reform program have no secure ownership rights to their plots, although some have "offer letters" that were provided to them when they were invited by the GOZ to resettle. The GOZ "Letters of Offer" do not provide acceptable collateral for loans.

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CURRENT STATUS OF KEY NATURAL RESOURCES  
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17. Soils: participants in the USAID-sponsored forum stressed the potential for "conservation agriculture" to curb erosion, maintain soil fertility, and improve the health of water catchments. The productivity of Zimbabwean agriculture has declined sharply in recent years. In addition to the oft-mentioned disruption caused by the GOZ's fast-track land reform program, this is largely due to the lack of secure tenure and the overall environment of economic insecurity. Soils are being mined of their nutrients, and are not being supplemented with enough fertilizers, mulch or manure, or protected by appropriate tillage practices. However, a natural soil regeneration process has begun on large areas of those former commercial farms that lie fallow.

18. Livestock: Levels of livestock in the country have sharply decreased due to diseases, missing fences, and human consumption. Neighboring countries are alarmed at the risk of the spread of livestock diseases, and the consequent threat to livestock, wildlife and humans. The Zimbabwe Veterinary Department has lost many of its qualified staff and does not have the resources to obtain sufficient drugs and vaccines. FAO expects to vaccinate 1 million livestock against Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) in the coming months. Botswana has erected a 500-km four-meter high electrified fence along its border with Zimbabwe, ostensibly to control the spread of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) (Note: this fence will likely have adverse consequences for wildlife migration patterns. End note.)

19. Wildlife: Despite the earlier, notable success of the USAID-funded CAMPFIRE program, through which rural residents benefited from and conserved their wild resources, Zimbabwe's wildlife is now under threat. Hungry rural residents are trapping meat for consumption, and others are exploiting the international hunting scene. Wildlife surveys traditionally carried out in Zimbabwe each year, previously with USAID support, have lapsed during the current crisis. The result is that levels of wildlife, and thus, the sustainability of the current off-take are not known.

110. Water: Forum participants raised numerous concerns about water resources in Zimbabwe. Almost half of the country's rural boreholes (water points) are in disrepair, and city water systems are compromised. The Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA) data base is not functional at present. Surface water supplies generally remain depleted from the drought 2 years ago, which means increased reliance on already overused boreholes for watering livestock, agriculture and human consumption. According to the IUCN Regional Office for Southern Africa (ROSA), watershed catchments are being degraded in some areas due to encroachment by new settlers and unsustainable agricultural practices. Overall water quality is also deteriorating.

111. Forests: The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reported on the Global Forestry Assessment for 2005 that is meant to monitor long-term forest change, changes in ownership of forests and other wooded land, and changes in characteristics such as growing stock, biomass, carbon, diversity, disturbances, wood and non-wood removal. For Zimbabwe, the report is based on often out-of-date field data, and no data at all is available for many of the required tables. FAO's report highlighted the need for updating figures and for adapting the management of Zimbabwe's natural forests to accommodate the current social and economic changes.

## ----- TOURISM -----

12. Tourism has suffered heavily as Zimbabwe's international image has worsened. Five star hotels and community-based enterprises alike are operating at a small fraction of their capacity, or have closed altogether. There has been no comprehensive investigation of the current status of tourism establishments. The GOZ has predicted an influx of Chinese tourists, particularly now that the country has a new direct flight to Beijing, but most analysts hold out scant hope that this could replace lost tourism from South Africa and Europe, or that it would provide the same level of spending per tourist. According to the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority, even factoring in the increase in tourists from Asia, tourism arrivals to Zimbabwe declined a further 29% in the 3rd quarter of 2004, from a previous decline of 33% over the same period in 2003. Big game hunting by expatriate clients is one form of tourism that continues despite Zimbabwe's image problem; rumors of unorthodox "safari" operators abound.

## ----- POLICY -----

13. Land policy in Zimbabwe remains problematic from a variety of perspectives. The GOZ's proposed new policies would convert wildlife conservancies into state land with 25-year leases. The GOZ's resettlement policy has neglected wildlife production as a legitimate land use option. Virtually all resettlement has been based on use of land for agriculture, despite the fact that in many regions of Zimbabwe poor rainfall and other agro-ecological conditions severely constrain agricultural production. Alternative land uses based on the sustainable use of wildlife have proven to be productive and profitable in the past in Zimbabwe. The GOZ is reportedly developing a draft Wildlife-Based Land Reform Policy, but it has not been released and is apparently stalled in draft form.

## ----- ON-GOING NRM ACTIVITIES -----

14. Most donors are concentrating their efforts on addressing the country's poor governance and the immediate humanitarian situation. Donors provide minimal support to natural resources management, other than short-term "protracted relief" programs that promote expansion of conservation farming techniques on communal lands. A few on-going NRM activities are tied to transboundary regional projects in 1) the Four Corners region where Zimbabwe, Zambia, Namibia and Botswana come together, and 2) in the South East lowveld area working with communities potentially involved in the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park. USAID support to the CAMPFIRE program ended in September 2003 and the Mission has not supported any natural resources or environmental activities since that time.

## ----- CONCLUSIONS -----

15. The forum's major conclusion were:

- A forum to discuss natural resources issues has been sorely lacking in Zimbabwe. Donor and NGOs expressed interest in continuing to meet periodically to share information.
- Soil fertility loss, deforestation, watershed damage, wildlife poaching, human settlement in protected areas and land tenure insecurity will continue for the foreseeable future, with negative impacts on Zimbabwe's natural resources. It is unlikely that significant investment in sustainable farming, natural resources-based livelihood practices or improved wildlife management will occur in the near term.
- There is no domestic "voice" or advocacy for natural resources issues at present, unlike agriculture which is represented by several farmers' unions. NGOs who appreciate the extent of the damage being done and who would normally advocate for action are forced to remain silent in the current repressive atmosphere, lest they raise political ire.
- Greater land tenure security will be key to improving both agricultural productivity and sustainable natural resources management.
- As long as Zimbabwe's governance issues continue to relegate the country to international isolation, its

previously well-managed natural resources will continue to deteriorate, escalating the cost of rebuilding its systems and regenerating its heritage.

SCHULTZ